

MEMORANDUM

To: Indiana School Superintendents and Principals

From: Office of Academics, Indiana Department of Education

Date: April 6, 2020

Re: Guidance on Grading Practices During Extended Remote Learning

Due to the recent school closures and the need for the extended implementation of remote learning, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) has received questions from schools about best practice for assigning grades to students. In particular, there have been many questions regarding the permissibility of pass/fail grades for the current semester or trimester.

With regard to grading practices in general, IDOE has the following recommendations:

- Grading practices should never be punitive. Consider setting a policy that bases a letter grade on the previous body of work, while allowing a grade to be raised or lowered, based on evidence during the extended remote learning time. This will ensure greater equity for all students, particularly those who may be lacking in resources and supports.
- Consider competency-based grading and alternative ways students can demonstrate learning.
- Concentrate on providing meaningful feedback on student progress once or twice a week.

The utilization of pass/fail grades:

With regard to students in kindergarten through grade 8, there is nothing that would prohibit the use of pass/fail grades. However, IDOE encourages using competency-based grading when possible. This approach to grading will provide better information to families and educators regarding a student's knowledge and identify where future support is needed.

With regard to transcribed high school courses, the issuance of pass/fail grades may cause issues for students meeting some graduation requirements. For the reasons outlined below, it is the position of IDOE that pass/fail grading may not be used for courses necessary to attain an Indiana diploma.

With regard to Academic Honors and Technical Honors diploma designations, 511 IAC 6-7.1-6, 7 requires students to earn a letter grade of "C" or higher in certain classes *and* maintain a cumulative grade point average of "B" in all courses. Thus, the issuance of pass/fail grades



would make it impossible for students to meet these graduation requirements. As such, if pass/fail grades were issued, students would be ineligible for Academic Honors and Technical Honors. Additionally, the Commission for Higher Education supports maintaining the rigors of the Academic Honors and Technical Honors diploma designations.

With regard to graduation waivers, IC 20-32-4-4 requires students to have a C average in courses required for graduation in order to be eligible for a waiver. Thus, as a letter grade average is statutorily required, and would preclude the use of pass/fail grades if a student would want to be considered for a waiver, from either the Graduation Qualifying Exam or Graduation Pathways, in the future.

The issuance of pass/fail grades may also adversely impact a student when applying for college if there is a prerequisite of certain letter grades in particular courses. Additionally, current NCAA eligibility guidelines require that a grade of “pass” be calculated in a student’s GPA as the lowest grade the school issues. For most schools, this would mean that a grade of “pass” would be calculated as a D, negatively impacting a student’s GPA.

Finally, IHSAA Rule 18-1 requires students to be enrolled in a certain number of classes, passing at least 70 percent of the classes. The language of the rule discusses grades and credit requirements. Allowing a pass/fail grade could potentially impact student eligibility for participation in high school sports.

For the reasons outlined above, IDOE does not believe the use of pass/fail grades for transcribed high school courses is advisable. If a local district chooses to pursue a pass/fail option, in spite of the compelling benefits of a letter grade system, the school board would likely need to pass a resolution to support that option.

If you have any further questions regarding grading requirements or the issuance of pass/fail grades, please reach out to Dr. Jennifer Jensen, Director of Teaching and Learning.